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AMERICAN LIBRARIES AND THE INVESTIGATOR

BY HERBERT PUTNAM

THE characteristic development of American libraries during the past half-century has been in the "popularization" of their service. Induced by a sense of obligation to the more general public, this has implied a special attention to what is called "the general reader." It has involved not merely schemes for attracting him, simplification of the apparatus with which he must deal in reaching the books, and a greater diversity of personal service in interpreting the collections to his taste or need, but also, in the choice of the books to be acquired and emphasis upon those adapted to his taste or calculated to meet his need. As regards his taste, these may be the most ordinary editions, for he is not engaged in those studies which require comparison of texts; and in the literature of knowledge, his need being for a lucid and also interesting presentation of fact, it will, as a rule, be satisfied, and even best served, by those books which expound and interpret. It does not require those which are the "original sources."

But the scholar, the investigator, cannot be so satisfied. He must have, in pure literature, the variant editions from the earliest; and in the literature of science (including history), the original sources. What during the half-century has been done for him by our libraries? In what case is an American scholar to-day who wishes to pursue his researches without a trip abroad?

A recent publication of the Bureau of Education helps to answer this question. It is a list, grouped by subject, of the "special collections" in the libraries of the United States. It offers thus a conspectus of the literature available here to one pursuing research in any one of the numer-

ous fields of knowledge. It is based not on an examination of the libraries, but on reports from the authorities in charge of them. It is thus necessarily defective; for even assuming the response to have been painstaking, it will in the case of the larger research libraries limit its specifications to the groups which stand out from the general collection, assuming that if the latter is not already familiar, it is, at any rate, too large and too diversified to be described within the compass of such a report. Yet it may be this very general collection whose strength is important, for it will be the one which will be apt to contain that vast body of miscellanea, touching every department of knowledge, which is the fiber and backbone of a good "working library."

The "special collections" reported will, on the other hand, be apt to be merely those which, acquired *en bloc*, by gift or purchase, and for some reason kept distinct, are recorded and referred to by some special title, or the name of the collector or of the donor. Even thus the list is suggestive.

The two features which first strike the attention are, the geographical location of the research material in general, and the lack of concentration in any particular institution of the material in a particular field which might result from its situation, its constituency, or the specialization of its collections under some general agreement.

A map of the United States indicating the present distribution of population would show over two-thirds of it to lie west of the Alleghanies. The present center of population is a point in southern Indiana. But of the three hundred odd institutions reporting in this list only forty lie west of the Alleghanies, and of these ten—no less than a quarter—are in Chicago, or the neighboring burg of Evanston. Apart, indeed, from Chicago, the research collections in the Middle, the Western, and the Southern States are exceedingly few, cover but sparse areas in literature, and these, if we except the material local to the region, areas of little apparent importance or relevance to any distinctive need. A great "source" collection in Pacific-coast history (such as the H. H. Bancroft) is logically fitting and useful at Berkeley. A notable collection on Australia may render good service in seminar and thesis work at Palo Alto, since any interest in continents beyond the Pacific naturally affects the higher studies along the Pacific slope. But the

availability at the University of California of a notable collection on the French Revolution is due only to the fortunate accident of the presence in its faculty of an historian who has "collected" on that subject. Similarly the collection on ichthyology at Leland Stanford, due to the presence there of Dr. Jordan. Among other collections whose location is traceable especially to such personal contact or interest are the Hopkins (also at Stanford) on railways; the J. J. Hill (at Madison) on railway economics; the Stearns (at Ann Arbor) on musical instruments; or the Swante Palm (at Austin, Texas) on Swedish history; the last named a wide reach indeed from the natural site of material in this field, which is of course either Chicago, Minnesota, or Wisconsin. That Dutch history should be a prime concern of the libraries of New York is obvious; but one would not look for a special collection on early Amsterdam in a library at Chicago (the John Crerar), nor one on Arctic exploration in a library at Cleveland, especially not in one whose devotion is particularly to the history of the mid-West. And by what happy, if illogical, chance has Ann Arbor come to be possessed of a collection—worthy of emphasis—on the early history of Ireland, or De Pauw, in Indiana, of one on Martial, or, for that matter, a Wisconsin historical society of a collection of Dutch literature, or a theological seminary at Chicago of a collection of Egyptology, or another seminary at Atlanta of a collection on the Greek-Russian Church?

On the history and literature of the particular denominations which sustain them the seminaries of the West have collected considerable records, but it is as widely dissociate as they are scattered: the Wesley movement may be studied at Evanston (in the Garrett Institute), the Lutheran at Rock Island and Dubuque, the Methodist Episcopal (South) at St. Louis, the Unitarian at Berkeley; but a *comparative* study would require a visit to all of these places. For theology in general even the considerable collections in Chicago might not exempt the student from an examination of the sixteenth and seventeenth century material in the College of Mount St. Clement at De Soto, Missouri, or the texts or exegesis in St. Anselm's at St. Meinrad, Indiana. And if in Semitica he can get along without a trip to the pre-eminent collection in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, he may still find one desirable to that of the

Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. The study of Mormonism may be pursued at Chicago, but may require recourse to Madison and to Lincoln, Nebraska.

In science there is but a note here and there of any special collection of significance outside of Chicago. In botany the most notable in the West is that of the Missouri Botanical Garden at St. Louis; but there is thought also worthy of report the collection in the Lloyd Library at Cincinnati—also stated to be strong in *materia medica* and pharmacy; while the State Laboratory of Natural History at Urbana, Illinois, boasts distinction in the literature of economic entomology, and especial attraction for those pursuing the fascinating themes of the “phylla vermes” and the “arthropoda.” The anatomist may, however, need to examine the Wilhelmhis collection, and the ophthalmologist the Cohn collection, at the University of Minnesota, and the investigator into the theory of grain rusts the literature of mycology also there; just as the student of iron-ore deposits may have to familiarize himself with the Kimball collection at Seattle, and the ichthyologist, as already indicated, with the Jordan collection at Palo Alto, or the microscopist with the collection of the San Francisco Society deposited at Berkeley.

The purchases for a university library are, as a rule, determined by the several faculties. Naturally, then, the emphasis will vary according to the vigor and enterprise of the several department chiefs for the time being; but with also a recognition of the fact that in certain departments the library itself being the laboratory, and the books necessary apparatus, their claims are entitled to preference. Particularly will this be true in history, in literature, and in the social sciences. Yet it is chiefly in the classical literatures that special collections are reported: as the Schulze and the Scherer at Evanston, the Reifferschied at Lake Forest, the Dittenberger at Urbana, the Kirchoff at Reno. The titles of these indicate their origin—the private library of some German professor acquired *en bloc*. Plato Alto names the Hildebrand in Germanic and Ann Arbor the Walter in Romance, together with a distinction not to be overlooked in the literature of Julius Cæsar, Goethe, Shakespeare, and the early English drama.

In the social sciences and sociology the mention of distinctive collections is meager: the Rau at Madison, Masonry

at Cedar Rapids. But in the foregoing notes I have included practically all of the places and the institutions reporting located west of the Alleghanies, except those in Chicago itself. Chicago contains (besides the public library, whose chief responsibility is, however, the general reader, and the Northwestern University with its fine Gary collection of law) three powerful collections for research. They are those of the University, of the Newberry Library, and of the John Crerar. The latter two, endowed and having divided the field between them, insure the most efficient development within their respective areas: the Crerar devoting itself to the natural, physical, and social sciences (including medicine); the Newberry specializing in history, philosophy, arts, and letters. Philology and pure science are, naturally, for the most part left to the University pursuant to its service as an academic library.* The united collections of these three institutions now number over seven hundred volumes, and the resources which in the aggregate they present to the investigator are indeed not merely prospectively, but in fact, formidable. They are, however, be it observed, concentrated in a single city within this vast area (west and south of the Alleghanies) embracing over two million square miles and two-thirds of the population of the United States. They are at an average distance of perhaps a thousand miles from a given investigator within this area. And outside of them, though the libraries are numerous and many of them constitute good "working" collections, some of them specialized material for the study of the locality; few, indeed, of them possess material important for original research in outside fields.

East of the Alleghanies the situation is far more favorable. There are indeed discrepancies, for while the main concentration is in a metropolis (New York), some of the most highly specialized collections are scattered elsewhere. Three university libraries—at Cambridge, Ithaca, and New Haven—are indispensable to the investigation of certain fields;† the Boston Public Library contains the Barton collection

* Yet the Lucien Bonaparte collection is not in the University Library, but in the Newberry.

† The student of philology, of literature, and of European history must visit Harvard; the student of Dante, of Petrarch, of Icelandic literature, or of certain fields of history must have recourse to the Willard Fiske and Andrew White collections at Cornell; the student of Oriental literature cannot avoid a visit to New Haven.

(Shakespeariana) and the Ticknor (Spanish literature); Wellesley College has the Plimpton collection (Tasso, Ariosto, and other Italian contemporaries); while the most notable collection of early Americana (wherever published) is at Providence. The investigator in statistics may need to consult the library of the American Statistical Society at Boston, while the Orientalist seeking original texts as well as commentaries may have to oscillate between New Haven, New York, Princeton, Brunswick, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

Yet the distances thus to be traversed are not prohibitive; and if to the resources of the New England and mid-Atlantic States we add those of the District of Columbia, the aggregate may seem impressive. In mere bulk it is; and a map of the United States graphically representing it would show this territory east of the Alleghanies deeply shaded, while that to the south and west, with the exception of a dark block in northern Illinois, would be white or of the lightest gray.

But the relative smallness of the area suggests another question: how far is this near proximity of these collections inducing a subdivision of the field of literature, which, by concentrating the funds of a particular institution or group of institutions upon a specified subject, shall insure the greatest possible aggregate of research material in the institutions as a whole? Unhappily, the evidence of such a subdivision is small. Not merely does each institution accept without demur, even courts, collections having no relevance to its locality or immediate service, it even goes further and applies its unrestricted funds to an attempt at an independent "comprehensiveness" of its own. The explanation is in part, perhaps, an inconsiderate vanity; but it is also, doubtless, the lack thus far of a system of inter-library loans sufficiently general to enable the unusual books in one collection to respond to the unusual need addressed to another.

The disposition to lend such books is in certain libraries quite notable; and the practice—as at Harvard—conforms to it. It is indeed recognized by a present committee of the American Library Association charged to formulate rules and methods for such loans. But the adoption of a general system, and one applicable generally to all classes of research material, finds in this group of libraries two obstacles: one, the fact that the particular book desired may be part

of a collection which by the terms of some gift or bequest cannot "circulate" outside of the institution; the other, some administrative rule or policy which regards the utility of the collection as proportioned to its completeness on the shelves for the reference use of a resident or visiting investigator. Every one of the large research libraries of the East holds collections subject to one or the other of such limitations. The Astor and Lenox collections in the New York Public Library are instances, or the John Carter Brown, a collection exclusively for reference use. The legal limitation where it exists is, of course, a fact and conclusive, and the administrative policy has much in its favor. It is and has always been the policy of the British Museum; and it has been deliberately adopted as the policy of the John Crerar at Chicago. In the case of the British Museum it is the less of a hardship because the collection is in a great metropolis, within a few hours' travel from any point in the British Isles. New York City is also a great metropolis, and much might be urged in favor of the policy of reserve there.

Its result, however, together with the effect of limitations purely legal, is to tie up within narrow areas of the East great masses of material important for research. It is not, therefore, the libraries of the East from which the investigator residing in the West or South can expect loans.

There remain the governmental libraries at Washington. These, with collections subject to no such limitations either legal or the result of administrative policy, have also an apparent duty to the country as a whole, since they are Federal and maintained by the country as a whole.

They include collections comprehensive—certain of them pre-eminent—in particular fields of science—as the library of the Geographical Survey, that of the Department of Agriculture, and that of the Surgeon-General's Office; but also the Library of Congress, which, while deferring to the specialties of the others, undertakes *all* fields. Of these, the library of the Surgeon-General's office, with its incomparable collection in medicine, surgery, and hygiene, instituted years ago the policy of liberal loans to distant inquirers; and there is no one of them that would refuse a request based upon a serious need.

With the Library of Congress the policy of loan was adopted after its removal to the new building and, incidental-

ly, to the nationalization of its service there. Its disposition is complete and embraces all classes of material not within the duty of a local institution to supply, with the sole reservation of that which cannot at the moment be spared from Washington, or that which from its bulk or character cannot be risked in transportation. This latter does not exclude from the loans material that is costly, rare, or difficult to replace, for it may be exactly such that will be most urgently needed because unavailable elsewhere. The policy in vogue, therefore, makes actually available to an investigator in any part of the United States the resources represented by its two million printed books and pamphlets and a large portion of the million other items, including its collection of music, many scores from which (unique in this country) have from time to time been forwarded to distant points to convenience a serious investigator. Such an investigator has only to apply to his local library, which requests the loan in his behalf. He must, however, meet the expense of transportation. And it is this which at present prevents a large development in the volume of the service. The parcels post recently enacted does not include such material, and while ten pounds of butter may be conveyed on a rural free-delivery route for fourteen cents, ten pounds of books would cost eighty cents.

A book, or at least a library, post which would favor literature at least equally with the ordinary articles of commerce, is so obviously just that the demand for it ought to be pressed to success. Certainly as applied to inter-library loans it ought to meet with no objection. It would not give undue advantage to the large department store in the great centers doing a mail-order business to the detriment of the local dealer. Its purpose would not be commercial at all, but educational and scientific; and to favor it would be quite consistent with the general policy of the mails.

Its effect in evening conditions over this huge expanse of country would be incalculable. For it is a mistake to assume that important research is carried on only at the centers of population, or even at the larger academic centers. In original research it is the man who counts. And in the smaller communities, especially, of course, in the smaller colleges all over this country, there are men competent for it, eager to undertake it, who are handicapped by the lack of

material. If it require a laboratory, the lack cannot be made good from elsewhere. But if it require merely a book it may be, and if it can be made good by the Federal Government, it ought to be. For the loan of a book is not a subsidy in the sense that it takes something substantial from other people for his benefit. His use draws nothing from the book which does not still remain there; and his use concluded, the book returns undiminished in its competence to render a similar service elsewhere.

It *does* return, for so secure is transportation to-day that since the inauguration of the system not a single item has been lost in transit. Abroad a similar experience; and in Germany, in Italy, and elsewhere masses of material, even precious and unique manuscripts, are sent from one end of the country to another without demur or apprehension.

The early purpose of these governmental collections at Washington was, of course, the service to the Government itself in its several departments—legislative, executive, and judicial. The creation, under the executive, of scientific bureaus necessarily widened their scope; for the work of these bureaus, while tending to some “practical” aim, in fact involves theoretic investigation in almost every branch of science. The amount annually expended in such investigation exceeds that of a number of other Governments put together. Its rapid enlargement in recent times is evidenced by the fact that in the Department of Agriculture alone the annual appropriations have increased during the past fifteen years from three to twenty-five millions of dollars. The collections have expanded correspondingly, so that outside of the Library of Congress itself these embrace now nearly a million and a half volumes. The strength of certain of these I have already indicated. For the scientist they are complemented by numerous items acquired by the Library of Congress with the deliberate aim of complementing them; and also by the great collection there of the publications of learned societies (exchanges of the Smithsonian) which, embodying the first communication of the results of scientific investigation, are the prime “source material” in the literature of science; and by the pre-eminent collection, also there, of the publications of foreign Governments received through international exchange.

This latter collection furnishes also essential resource for the investigator in history, in administration, in politics,

and in law; its 350,000 volumes recording not merely the enactments, but the legislative proceedings of most of the nations of the globe. Auxiliary to them are the files of miscellaneous serials—some fifteen thousand of which are currently received—and of representative newspapers. Years ago it was ascertained that of some 2,000 sets—mostly serial—requisite for the study of European history, only two-thirds were to be found in the libraries of the United States as a whole. The defect is, doubtless, receiving the attention of many libraries; at the Library of Congress it has induced the placing of orders for every item lacking.

In law, the richest single collection in the United States is still, doubtless, that at Harvard. But the collection at Washington is being developed rapidly, as becomes its proper future as the library of our highest tribunal and as the appropriate source of knowledge of the laws of all foreign countries; not merely those under which they have developed, but those under which they are living and acting to-day. For the student of comparative jurisprudence it is likely that this collection will offer the completest resources to be found in this country.

In history, the source material (except as it may be monuments) is manuscript; and the manuscript sources of foreign history are and will substantially remain, abroad. In the history of America, however, in which the interest of American historians largely lies and to which the duty of this national library particularly applies, a scheme of transcript and of facsimile is bringing to Washington exact *reproductions* of the important documents which will save to many an investigator a trip abroad.

The literature of sociology is itself chiefly secondary in form, and in printed sources reasonably procurable. While investigations highly specialized may, therefore, require recourse to such a collection as the Ely or the Gerritsen at Chicago (in which many a fugitive pamphlet has been preserved), the main body of it will in the ordinary course become available in the national collection.

Nor are these, though the natural, the only fields in which the Library of Congress offers, or will offer, material for investigation independent of local conditions. Its acquisitions have included certain collections *en bloc*, which represent distinctive strength in unexpected fields; the Albrecht Weber collection in Indology, for instance; the Huitfeldt-

Kaas in Scandinavian history and literature; the Yudin in Russian and Siberian history, institutions, and literature (the last named the richest, perhaps, outside of Russia). And if we add the collection of maps, of music, and of prints, the prospective acquisitions in the literature proper of the fine arts and architecture, and the department of Semitica recently founded by a notable gift and with assurances favorable to its future, it will be apparent that in theory, at least, the library eschews no department of the literature of knowledge.

Which is not to say that recourse to it could now, or will ever, exempt an investigator (particularly in history, in theology, or in language and literature) from a visit to the research libraries of the more northern East, or from drafts upon them.

The more reason, then, for the inauguration among them of a policy of differentiation among themselves that will insure the most efficient application of their own resources as a whole; the avoidance on the part of each of expenditure—either for acquisition or for administration—in specialized material either unnecessary for its immediate service or unnecessarily duplicating what is already or might be made sufficiently available elsewhere; and such a liberality in the treatment of it as shall promote research in general and not merely that of the immediate locality.

Included in this treatment should be not merely the actual loan of particular books, but a wide dissemination of information as to the contents of their collections that may have distinctive value. This may consist of prompt and generous response to any particular inquiry, but it ought to include a permanent exhibit at various points of at least portions of their catalogues. The present system of card catalogue, with the cards printed, offers opportunity for this. It enables the Library of Congress, for instance, to place at some fifty different institutions which are centers of investigations what will constitute such a complete exhibit of its printed books and pamphlets. And “union” catalogues, consolidating with these sets, cards which represent distinctive books or editions not in the Library of Congress but available in some other collection, ought to be available not merely at Boston, at New York, and at Chicago (where to some extent they are already in process), but at certain other places as well.

Should a differentiation in these fields be attempted, what should be its basis? A definition universally applicable would be impracticable, for within any particular area it must take account of the existing situation; and in proportion to the area it may have to be modified. An exhaustive collection on marriage at the John Crerar may well exempt other Chicago libraries from specializing in this particular topic, but a Dante collection at Ithaca may not render unnecessary a considerable Dante collection at Cambridge, for the faculties and students of Harvard also are engaged in original investigations which require the main source books as well as the commentaries for continuous service there. In this latter case it is only the rare and rarely needed volume, which—liberality in loan being assumed—should not be duplicated. Certain general principles may, however, be posited, among them these:

1. The functions of the particular library should be considered, its local constituency, or its choice of constituency, and its control of its own development. A municipal library, with a duty primarily to the diffusion rather than the advance of learning, is in a different case from an academic library which is looked to to promote the research work of its faculties; and both of these are in a different case from an endowed library, such as the Crerar, the Newberry, or the Lenox, which were free to select a field and, incidentally, a constituency; or from the Carter Brown, which, by the terms of its foundation, has both field and constituency determined for it.

2. A library already pre-eminent in a specialty should be allowed to pursue it, if its resources permit.

3. Research in any given subject tending to ramify into many fields of literature, the greatest practicable *concentration* of material in a few main centers, will tend to convenience it. Special collections—not merely local—proposed as gifts should, therefore, be directed to the libraries at such centers rather than to some outlying point where they will be ineffective in their isolation. The present main centers would, perhaps, be Boston, New York, Chicago, and Washington; the last named because, though not a center of population, it is the national capital. Its present collections are large and in some fields pre-eminent; they are already consulted by numerous investigators (and, incidentally, serve as an invigorating or cultivating influence

upon thousands of ordinary visitors); and being under a national authority, with a duty to the country as a whole, their service is made to reach out, where possible, to the entire country. The existence at Washington of a great museum and of scientific laboratories, such as those of the Bureau of Standards and that (in geophysics) of the Carnegie Institution, all freely hospitable to a visiting investigator, also insures there an effective use of the literature of science in connection with the concrete investigations if in science, just as the presence there of Congress, of the Federal Executive, and of the Supreme Court offers unique opportunity for observation in the field of law, politics, and administration, and the presence of the Carnegie Bureau of Historical Research promotes it in the study of history.

With a differentiation in effect, and the co-operation with interchange of service, which is a condition of it, we may see beyond the American zeal in acquisition which brings masses of precious material to this country, and then cumulates it in a few favored centers; we may see the American talent for efficiency applying itself to the diffusion of this material in a service to American scholarship as a whole.

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